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The image shows the front cover of an old book. The cover is decorated with a marbled paper pattern. The pattern consists of large, irregular, rounded shapes in shades of brown and tan, separated by a network of dark blue or black lines. The overall effect is reminiscent of a stone or biological cell pattern. On the left side, there is a vertical strip of dark material, likely the spine or a hinge. In the bottom left corner, there is a small, dark rectangular label with gold-colored text.

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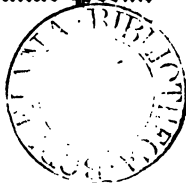


THE
BURNING OF THE AMAZON,
A Ballad-Poem.

THE PROFITS, IF ANY, TO BE APPLIED FOR THE BENEFIT OF
THE SUFFERERS BY THE CALAMITY.

THE
BURNING OF THE AMAZON,

A Ballad-Poem.



BY THE

REV. CHAUNCY HARE TOWNSHEND.

LONDON:
CHAPMAN & HALL, 193, PICCADILLY.
1852.

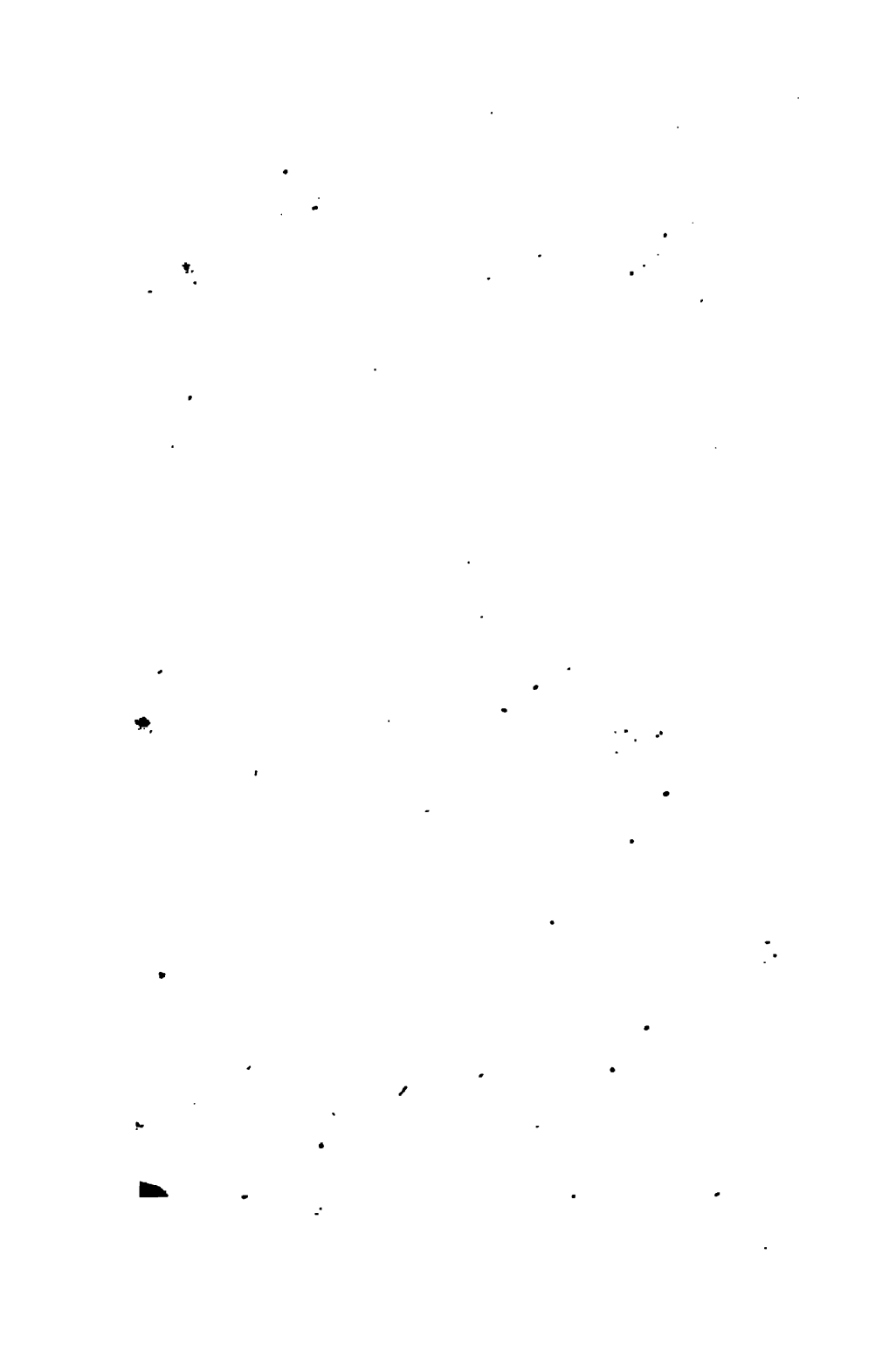
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THE
BURNING OF THE AMAZON.

THE ship was on the midnight sea,
Nor moon, nor stars were shown ;
She seem'd beneath a doom to be—
The steam-ship Amazon !

For, since from harbour she had dropp'd
Unto old Ocean's rule,
Twice had she been on mid-wave stopp'd
To let her engines cool.



THE
BURNING OF THE AMAZON,
A Ballad-Poem.

Then by a gunwale down I lay ;

I did not wish to sleep,

But o'er me with resistless sway

A slumberous load did creep.

And many more, that night so drear,

An equal weight did press ;

And eyes that fain had waked for fear

Were closed for heaviness.

I must have slept, and had a dream.

Two men seem'd near to me :

They mutter'd—" Rise, or in God's name

The ship blown up will be ! "

I started to my feet. All round

My eyes could nothing see :

There was no voice—no human sound—

A pause—a vacancy !

To usual sounds my ear was strain'd—
The winds aloft that rave,
The whistling of the engines, and
The bursting of the wave.

Hark ! 'Twas a human voice came by !
Again, methought, and nigher.
Twice on the silence breaks a cry—
A stifled cry—of “ Fire ! ”

Nay—nay !—'Tis nothing !—Sleep again !
Sounds often thus before
Have pass'd with falsehood o'er my brain :
I will not heed them more !

Hark ! Hark ! A bell ! 'Tis not the watch !
It is not midnight's roll !
Again—again—the sound I catch !—
'Tis—'tis—the fire-bell's toll !

Oh God ! the change !—No mortal breath
That sudden fear can tell.
One moment all was still as death,
The next, all wild as Hell !

One moment, 'twas the cool salt wave
Into the face upcast :
The next, hot fires that roar and rave—
A very furnace-blast !

I saw the dismal flames rush up :
All hands to quench them came :
But all we did, was as a cup
Of water to that flame !

“Stop, stop the engines !” was the cry :
“For who a boat can lower,
While thus along we plunge and fly,
At thirteen knots an hour ?”

Vain words, which answering horrors chide !

The flames the engine feed ;

At once the crew's approach forbid,

And urge the vessel's speed.

Aright, aleft, the windows cleft

With heat all snapping go :

The enemies three—fire, wind, and sea—

Unite against us now !

With crackling timbers shrieks combine :

The ship, amidst the rout,

Dash'd like a mad bull through the brine,

Tossing the waves about.

Yet, yet, to clear the boats we strive ;

And one is partly down :

She swamps ! she swamps ! and twenty-five

Beneath the deep are gone !

Our hurried hands move slow, alas !

We fain would have unbraced
The foremost life-boat ; but she was
In iron crutches placed.

Then some to lower the pinnacle look'd ;

We got her partly free !
Ere the fore-tackle was unhook'd,
She shear'd across the sea.

And so were all wash'd out of her—

A dozen at a blow !
The boat remain'd in mockery there,
Still hanging by the bow.

Away the second cutter clear !

A sea marr'd all our pains—
Struck her—unhook'd her bow-tack gear,
And raised her off the cranes.

Down instantly the fore-end fell,
And, with it downward slung,
The crew amidst the surge and swell
Were into ocean flung.

But two hung doubled o'er the thwarts :
(Such desperation wild
Was there as nerves but Mothers' hearts)
A Mother and her child !

I looked into the quarter-deck ;
I saw the Captain stand
Calm 'midst the tumult and the wreck,
Calm 'midst a frenzied band !

To us he cried, " The flames are near !
Now, man your boats ! be brave !
My duty is to perish here !
Your duty is to save ! " * .


* See note at the end.

The starboard life-boat from her place
We lower—our only hope ;
The hair was burnt from off my face
Ere I could cut the rope.

Into her off the deck we sprung ;
She now was well afloat ;
The men, upon the tackle hung,
Slide down into the boat.

We wish'd to stay some more to save ;
Too quick the ship's career :
She had such way upon the wave,
We could not hold by her.

So we let go, and dropp'd astern,
(O moment passing speech !)
We saw the vessel burn, and burn,
We heard the loud death-screach.



When out of hearing of that cry,
Still to our vision came
Half-naked wretches wandering by,
Like shadows in a flame.

They stir them more—those madden'd throngs—
As by wild beasts pursued :
The fire stretch'd out its thousand tongues,
To gorge its human food.

And all amid the rout and reel
That rock'd and struggled there,
Some calmly on the deck did kneel
To yield their souls in prayer.

Leagues—leagues—the furnace-splendour spreads,
Enwombed in the night :
The waves hung quivering o'er our heads
Tinged with that lurid light.

It seem'd a triumph and a vaunt,
That cruel spectacle,
Illumination jubilant
As ever gladden'd Hell !

A gasping wretch, swept by us, came
Unto the surface up.
We threw him aid : a gurgling scream
Told he had miss'd the rope.

Upon our souls came shocks so rude,
Death in our face so stared,
We had no room for gratitude,
We felt not we were spared.

The waves about us raved and dash'd,
As clamouring for a prey ;
The oars they were amid-ships lash'd,
The rudder stow'd away.

Yet still our bark the billows braved ;
Our oars unlash'd we got ;
We heard a hail : five lives we saved
Out of a little boat.

We thought that God our safety will'd,
When came another stroke :
A heavy sea our boat half fill'd,
Away our rudder broke.

To find the beakers, too, we fail,
We sate half froze with doubt :
Then cut our boots in haste to bale
The gushing waters out.

Betwixt us and the burning ship
A bark now hove in view ;
We saw her with a quivering lip,
And Expectation grew.

She seem'd not many cables' length
Away from us to wear ;
We hail'd her with the horrid strength
Of men that touch despair.

She answers us ! By Heaven, mark
She bears up on our right !
We gasp'd with hope. The treacherous bark
Went off into the night !

And now we sunk, and now we rose
From vales to mountain steeps ;
If sudden had those billows froze,
How had they stood on heaps !

When to the billows' ridge we pass,
We hear the tempest's breath :
Between the valley-wave there was
A stillness like to death.

Four hours thus we tossed and toiled :
Then was the rain unloosed,
Which laid the billows, though they boiled.
Decreasing yet confused.

And still we saw the burning ship.
So dark, so bright, it seemed :
Its form on the horizon's dip,
For ever burned and beamed.

In its own burning light 'twas traced,
A phantom, all of fire,
But like a dream, with sudden haste
That vision did expire.

For now, with rockets skyward sent,
The magazines explode :
Over the side the funnels went,
Red-hot the chimneys glowed.

A form that in a limekiln melts
All in a moment gone,
Was like that ship. Down, down she tilts !
Adieu to Amazon !

'Twas like a death : we felt it so,
And grieved with such a sigh
As mourns a friend's last breath, although
We knew that he must die.

Now dawned a little peep of light :
Another day for men
Was come. Clouds went off to the right ;
And I remembered then


'Twas Sunday morn ; and then I weened
How yestereve did say
The Captain : “ Let your decks be cleaned
Against the Sabbath-day ! ”

Oh had he known what words were there,
That speech had been withdrawn.
For such a Sabbath surely ne'er
On mortal man did dawn !

And yet the day was clear and bright
As ever day could be ;
As if it had forgot the night :—
It seemed a mockery !

There was a quiet in the air,
Our fears no more were stirr'd :
Why lengthen out my tale ? We were
Picked up, as you have heard.

You think our joy was great and sweet ?
But we were worn with pain :
A firm deck underneath our feet
Scarce seemed to us a gain.



Pangs of the burning ship, alas !

Seemed with us to survive.

For me, I almost felt it was

A sin to be alive.

So many thoughts did me amaze,

My heart was sore opprest ;

Perplexed with God's mysterious ways,

I laid me down to rest.

I slept. My inner eyes unclosed

On things that hidden be ;

And, while my body soft reposed,

A vision greeted me.

The sea was there ; but, oh, how changed,

To peace and brightness given !

O'er it the eye with rapture ranged :

It seemed the floor of Heaven !

(Thus once I saw the clouds when I
A mountain-peak had won,
And did their upper side descry
Illumined by the Sun.)

A plain of silver—steadfast—soft—
In wavy splendour wide ;
As if the sea were hung aloft—
A sea beatified !

That surface angel-feet did kiss,
And glide and tremble o'er,
Whose very motion seemed a bliss—
Fit feet for such a floor !


Harps in their hands they carried all,
Though silent yet they be ;
But from the crowd an angel tall
Came nigh to talk with me.

He said—(the words are not my own,
Into my soul they flowed)—
“Thou grievest for the Amazon,
Almost thou blamest God!

Now let thy heart be better nerved,
In doubt no more be tost :
Good is it that thou wert preserved,
And good that these were lost.

Her veil let sad Appearance doff ;
Beneath, fair things are spread :
Survivors succoured, tears wiped off,
And mourners comforted.

A thousand deeds of lovely name
To generous Pity known,
Shall light their torches at the flame
That burnt the Amazon.



Hence ev'n the churl his treasure parts,
New thoughts the harsh surprise :
Each death in countless living hearts
Wakes countless sympathies.

And they whose transient agony
So much of good hath sown
In breasts of frail humanity—
Shall they themselves reap none ?

Oh, think it not ! Of power to bless
God never is bereft ;
Deem'st thou our Father loveth less
The taken than the left ?

Believest thou that Mercy's plan
Is in the grave down trod ?
Believest thou the death of man
Can change the heart of God ?

What if, from evil snatched to Heaven,

Rejoice that perished host ?

What if a thousand joys be given

For every joy that's lost ?

What if by this from out them rolls

The throb of low desires ?

What if the fires to cleanse those souls

Were just those very fires ?

Ye joyful throngs that round me are,

What was your loss to-day ?

Would ye again to earth repair ?

Ye Spirits, speak and say ! ”

Then stirred as if with joy the cloud,

New forms to vision start ;

Voices like incense from the crowd

Distilled upon my heart.

And separate spirits from the throng
 Flashed out upon my sight ;
As each in turn took up the song,
 In turn they each grew bright.

Oh, how that heavenly sound aspires,
 So thrilling yet serene ;
While touches of their throbbing lyres
 Filled up each pause between.

One silver tongue said, " Praised be Christ !
 I, in a foreign land,
Should soon have been to sin enticed,
 And fraudulent schemes have planned.

Now to my stainless ocean-tomb
 'There cleaveth nothing base ;
Oh blessed be the holy doom,
 'That saved me from disgrace ! "

Another said, " Though life had not
Such woe in store for me ;
Is there no blessing in the lot,
Think'st thou that fell on me ?

Mine was on earth a poet's name ;
I panted to fulfil
A vision of a loftier fame,
But Death is lovelier still !

'Tis o'er ; 'tis o'er ! The yearning sore
That makes the soul a dearth :
The speechless sigh for something more
Than can be found on earth !

And see my amaranth wreath ! " he cried :
Then waved it from afar,
And shed a splendour sparkling wide,
As evening's richest star.

One murmured, " Praised be God's high will !

My course on earth I ran,

Still sad—though uncomplaining still—

A poor neglected man !

I saw the unworthy, loud in voice,

Set ever o'er my head.

All humble duties were my choice,

In peace my heart I fed.

But now my soul all grief discards,

On me doth Honour beam,

God hath for service such rewards

As Earth can never dream ! "

With that, as if of joy re-born,

That happy soul did move,

Glad as a cloud that drinks the Morn,

And kindles into love.

Then choral strains came loud and clear,
Whose tones—so sweet they rung—
Left bliss upon my waking ear,
And thus the Spirits sung !

“ Joy, joy, is round us like a flood !
Life’s glorious plan we see !
Can there be Evil without Good ?
Oh, no ! there cannot be !

There’s nothing scattered—nothing lost—
No night without a day !
All praise to Him, who giveth most
When most He takes away ! ”

NOTE.

Page 13, line 16.

Your duty is to save!

To solve a dilemma, I have adopted one of many conflicting statements, and have assumed it to be most in consonance with all that is known of this brave officer, that he was really animated by the feeling described in the text. Indeed, one of the witnesses ascribed to him very nearly the exact expressions used above.

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